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Goal pursuit and acculturation

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Chapter 6

GENERAL DISCUSSION

People create mental representations of desired end states, which fuel their everyday behavior and regulate their actions (Heckhausen & Gollwitzer, 1987; Kruglanski et al., 2002), giving structure to their everyday lives. The pursuit of these desired end-states (or goals) is often viewed as means towards a fulfilling life (Emmons, 2003; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Indeed, both the striving towards goals that are deemed important and the attainment of these goals have been found to play an important role in peoples' happiness and well-being (e.g., Brunstein, 1993; Niemiec et al., 2009). Goal pursuit, however, is not independent from the context in which it takes place (Brandstadter, 2009). People often have to adjust their goals to meet the changes in their opportunities, demands and resources (Salmela-Aro, 2009). Likewise, depending on the context in which people operate, some goals are harder to reach than others and their (lack of) attainment may have differential effects.

This dissertation focuses on goal pursuit in the migration context. Goals seem highly relevant to the migration context. For instance, migration often requires people to adjust their goals, set new goals, or reconsider to which goals they should give precedence to. Moreover, the whole migration process is often set in motion in order to maximize one's goal potential. Yet, we know little about how goal pursuit contributes to the success of migration, namely to acculturation and well-being.

The aim of this dissertation is to provide an overview of our current knowledge in the field of migrant motivation and goal pursuit (Chapter 2), and to further explore the relationship between goal pursuit and adjustment, by providing more insight into how the attainment of important personal goals predicts acculturation and/or well-being (Chapter 3, 4, 5). In due course, this dissertation presents a holistic overview of the role of goal structure, processes and content in explaining migration success in general; and provides insight into the role of goal importance and goal attainment (e.g., intrinsic and extrinsic goals, career goals) in explaining acculturation and/or well-being in particular.

Below, we will first summarize our main findings. Further, we will discuss the implications of our findings and highlight some potentially fruitful avenues for future research. Moreover, we address the strengths and limitations of our research and also outline the practical implications of our findings.

Summary of the Main Findings

Chapter 2. In Chapter 2, we reviewed the literature on the current knowledge of how goal pursuit contributes to migration success. Research on the influence of the motivation of migrants on their acculturation and well-being is not well developed (either conceptually or methodologically) and missing a clear

theoretical framework. Contemporary motivation theories are awaiting to be applied in migration research (Chirkov et al, 2007). In this chapter, we aimed to provide a framework that helps to understand the current state of knowledge, is suited to identify gaps in our knowledge and assists with pointing to specific areas that need further research. We distinguished between the three stages of the migration process (pre-migration, during migration and potential repatriation and onward migration); and the three different goal facets (content, structure, process; see Austin & Vancouver, 1996). By conducting a systematic literature search we identified 30 articles that took place in a first-generation migration setting, and included both a relevant goal-related predictor variable and an outcome variable at the migrant level (e.g. adjustment, well-being, career success, political integration). Our systematic literature study yielded some interesting findings. For instance, research on goal content in the pre-migration and during migration stages seemed to be most developed, and indicated that various motives (e.g., motives focusing on economic aspects, political aspects, cultural exploration, etc.) may have an impact on migrants' well-being and acculturation, however the findings are not always consistent. Differences in the 'type' (international students, expats etc.) and the origin of migrants (their home country) seem to have effects on the relationship between goal content and migration outcomes. In addition, in line with the predictions of SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), autonomy seems to be beneficial to adjustment for various groups of migrants. Research on the structure and process of goals is more scarce. We know little about how migrants establish their goals, how they monitor their progress and under what circumstances they adjust them, and we know even less about the effects these issues have on migration success. Notably, despite its relative scarcity, the existing studies on repatriation give us particularly valuable insights into the complex and dynamic nature of migration motivation. These studies tend to take the whole migration trajectory into account and view the return decision and the readjustment to the home country in light of the pre-migration motives and previous experiences in the host country (see Sener, 2018; Yehuda-Sternfeld & Mirsky, 2014).

Taken together, this chapter shows that using the goal pursuit and motivation perspective can be a fruitful approach to increase our understanding of acculturation, however we need a lot more research on the topic. A couple of the many possible avenues for future research are, for instance, research on the personal relevance (goal importance, - commitment and -engagement) and on the hierarchy of goals in relation to acculturation; research on how migrants modify their goals and how such modifications relate to their success and further migration desires; or research on how differences in the type of migration, the cultural heritage of migrants, and

the geographic characteristics of the move (e.g., sending and receiving countries) play a role in later migration success.

Chapter 3. In Chapter 3, we empirically tested the relationship between goal pursuit and acculturation and life satisfaction. Previous research demonstrated the beneficial role of having intrinsic goals on well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1996, 2001; Niemiec et al., 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000a) and showed how such goals shield from depression and anxiety (Rijavec et al, 2006; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). The relationship between intrinsic goals and adjustment, however, has received much less research interest (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Chirkov et al., 2007). Yet, as we discussed in this chapter, there are reasons to expect that intrinsic goals are important for adjustment of migrants. As such, we investigated the interplay of intrinsic goal importance and goal attainment on acculturation and subsequent well-being. First, we hypothesized that the positive relationship between migrant intrinsic goal attainment and migrant satisfaction with life is mediated by migrant acculturation level. Second, we hypothesized that the negative relationship between migrant intrinsic goal attainment and migrant depression is mediated by migrant acculturation. Lastly, we predicted that the relationship between intrinsic goal attainment and acculturation is moderated by goal importance. Specifically, we expected that the relationship between goal attainment and acculturation is stronger for goals that are deemed important. As a first test of our hypotheses, we conducted an experiment (Study 1) with non-migrant individuals in which we manipulated goal importance and goal attainment. After reading a scenario of a fictional migrant, participants filled out a series of questions regarding the perceived well-being and acculturation of the described migrant. The finding of the first study were in line with our hypotheses, confirming both our mediation hypothesis and our proposed moderation effect. In Study 2a we aimed replicate the experiment with a migrant sample. In this study we manipulated goal attainment and used migrants' own perceptions as the measure of goal importance. While we found confirmation of our mediation hypotheses, this study did not reveal an interaction effect between goal attainment and goal importance on acculturation. In two subsequent studies (Study 2b and Study 3) we used migrants' self-report questionnaires to test the proposed relationships. In Study 2b we asked Central-Eastern European migrants to list three of their current goals and assess their importance and attainment and we then asked them to fill out scales assessing their acculturation, life satisfaction and depression. We found confirmation of both the mediation and the moderation hypothesis. In Study 3, we tested the proposed relationship using Kasser and Ryan's (1996) Aspiration Index to measure intrinsic goal attainment and goal importance of Hungarian migrants living in the

Netherlands, and found that acculturation indeed served as a mediator between goal pursuit and well-being. However, the data did not reveal a significant moderation effect of goal importance. In sum, while the mediating role of acculturation in the relationship between goal attainment and well-being (and depression) was consistently confirmed, the role of goal importance in the relationship between goal attainment and acculturation is less clear. There is some indication that the relationship is stronger if the goal is perceived important but further research is necessary to clarify this effect.

Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, we further investigated the effect of the interplay between goal importance and goal attainment on acculturation, this time focusing on a domain specific context, namely career goals. We argued that attaining important career goals in the host country increases the extent to which migrants feel to be valuable members of the society (Wassermann, Fujishiro, & Hoppe, 2017), which potentially shields them from uncertainty or negative experiences from other life domains (see Brett, 1980; Lyons, Brenner, & Fassinger, 2005). This, in turn, may foster acculturation and feelings of adjustment. We also posited that realizing important career goals is easier for those migrants who are self-efficacious (see Gutierrez-Dona et al., 2009; Lippke et al., 2009), as self-efficacious migrants may take more initiative, are more likely to expand their networks, search for better opportunities and more generally show sustained effort (see Ballout, 2009; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). In a longitudinal study, we tested whether Time 1 career importance in interaction with self-efficacy predicts migrant career success and subsequent acculturation in Time 2. As expected, our result revealed that career importance predicted perceived career success for people with high self-efficacy, but not for people with low self-efficacy. Furthermore, we found that career success mediated the relationship between career importance and acculturation among people with high self-efficacy, but not among people with low self-efficacy. These results underpin the important role of self-efficacy in realizing work-related goals for people who have to face the difficulties of migration. Furthermore, the findings draw attention to the fact that migrants' work-related goals and the realization of these goals are important cornerstones of their sociocultural adjustment in the host country.

Chapter 5. In Chapter 5 we set out to enrich our knowledge about human motivation by studying how the congruence between goal importance and goal attainment affects well-being; and by investigating whether the differential content of individual goal pursuit has distinct contributions to well-being. In this chapter, we addressed the link between individual goal pursuit and well-being, independently from the context of the goal pursuit (such as migration). While

acculturation was not included in this chapter, we broadened our perspective in terms of goal content, and focused on both intrinsic as well as extrinsic goals. First, we hypothesized that the degree of discrepancy between intrinsic goal attainment and goal importance will be associated with well-being, such that particularly if goal attainment exceeds goal importance, people will experience an increase in well-being. Furthermore, in line with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT, see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 1996), we predicted that the congruence between intrinsic goal attainment and importance will be positively related to subjective well-being. With regard to extrinsic goals we had two competing hypotheses: The first one being that the congruence between extrinsic goal attainment and importance will benefit well-being (similarly to intrinsic goals). The second one being that the congruence between extrinsic goal attainment and importance will be negatively associated with well-being. We used polynomial regression and response surface analysis to test our hypotheses. This analysis is ideal to assess the joint effect of two predictor variables (and their congruence or discrepancy) on a third variable (see Edwards, 1994, 2001). Our results showed that the impact of intrinsic goal attainment does not outweigh that of intrinsic goal importance. The impact of extrinsic goal attainment, however, does outweigh that of extrinsic goal importance. Moreover, as expected, we found that the congruence between intrinsic goal attainment and importance is positively related to well-being. Interestingly, certain intrinsic goal sub-dimensions (personal development and relationship) showed a curvilinear effect on well-being, denoting that placing too much importance on these goals may be harmful rather than beneficial to well-being. Finally, in relation to extrinsic goals, none of our competing hypotheses were confirmed: seemingly, the realization of extrinsic goals that are considered important is neither harmful, nor beneficial to well-being. Our findings underpin the unique impact of the specific goal content on well-being, and highlight the joint effect of goal attainment and importance on well-being. It also shows that it may be worthwhile to apply polynomial regression and response surface analysis when investigating the joint effect of goal importance and goal attainment on well-being and acculturation in the migration context.

Theoretical Implications and Future Directions

The research we presented in this dissertation aimed to expand our understanding of the role of motivation and goal pursuit in the migration success and well-being. We relied on different theoretical underpinnings and applied it to the migration context. Particularly, we were interested in whether or not the theoretical assumptions of how goal pursuit contributes to well-being could be

expanded to explain the adjustment of migrants. In due course, we focused on questions, such as: What do we already know about the relationship between goal pursuit and migration success? Would particularly the attainment of important goals predict adjustment and subsequent well-being? Do all goal types contribute to acculturation and well-being to the same extent? Does career success affect acculturation? We believe that our literature review and empirical research contributes to the existing knowledge on the role of motivation in acculturation processes and shows that the goal pursuit perspective may be a fruitful novel approach in the study of acculturation and well-being of migrants. While the traditional frameworks of acculturation, namely the stress-and coping, social learning, and social identification theories (e.g., Berry, 1997; Kuo, 2014; Phinney et al., 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1994) often emphasize the effects of the external challenges a migrant has to face, the motivational approach shifts the focus to intra-individual processes and zooms in on how these are related to the outcomes of migration for the migrant him- or herself. Because specific theoretical implications and directions for future research are discussed in each individual chapter, in this section, we will only highlight some more overarching theoretical contributions of this dissertation.

This dissertation provides empirical evidence for the notion that the attainment of (important) goals makes migrants feel more culturally adjusted to the host country, which in turn, helps them to feel satisfied with their lives and feel less depressed or anxious. Goal attainment seem to benefit migrants across different goal domains. The pursuit of intrinsic goals that support innate needs such as autonomy, competence and connectedness (see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 1996) not only foster the extent to which people are satisfied with their lives, but also predict how well migrants fit in the host culture. Across various samples we provided evidence that attaining intrinsic goals, such as good relationships, personal development, feeling useful for the larger community and having good physical health, make migrants feel acculturated. We provided further evidence on the beneficial role of goal attainment, showing that the attainment of any self-selected goals and specific career goals also enhances migrants' acculturation. In contrast, goal importance seems to contribute little to both well-being and acculturation by itself. In fact, intrinsic goal importance was associated to lower levels of acculturation among Hungarian migrants. Additionally, we found some curvilinear effects of intrinsic goal importance on well-being, denoting that there is an optimal point up to which goal importance is beneficial to well-being. These findings are somewhat conflicting with previous assumptions focusing on the positive effects of setting and striving for (intrinsic) goals (e.g., Diener, 1984;

Emmons; 1986; Kasser & Ryan, 1996) on well-being. Seemingly, the mere striving for goals does not make migrants adjusted and satisfied in their host country. Goal importance explains well-being and acculturation best when it is viewed in conjunction with goal attainment. Earlier, Zimmermann et al. (2017) reported the benefits of the joint effect of goal importance and attainment on international students' adjustment. Our results, showing that acculturation is highest when goals are achieved and also considered important, are in line with these findings. Some of our results, however, did not confirm this assumption, as goal importance did not significantly enhance the positive effect of goal attainment on acculturation in each and every study that we conducted. Perhaps sometimes placing high importance on certain goals are representative of high expectations or pressure on the migrant, which may hinder the positive effects of goal setting and goal attainment.

Feeling successful at one's career, despite the challenges of living and working in a foreign environment is not always easy. We found evidence that migrants' professional goal pursuit is an important pillar of their cultural adjustment. In fact, being able to turn important career goals into career success may benefit migrants' feelings of fitting in the host society. However, we also found that only self-efficacious migrants seem to be able to turn important career goals into attainment, and boost their sociocultural adjustment through their career goal pursuit. Self-efficacious migrants might be more likely to persistently work towards their goals, attempting to change their environment in a way so it fits their aspirations (see the goal engagement-promoting pathway; Shane & Heckhausen, 2013; Bernardo et al., 2018). Our findings on the one hand indicate that individuals' self-efficacy beliefs can make a fundamental difference explaining why some migrants feel successful in their environment and others not. The findings also draw attention to the benefits of career goal pursuit on acculturation.

Another important finding of the present dissertation is that goal pursuit enhances migrants' overall well-being via their acculturation. In a context that carries new challenges, threats and opportunities, adjustment seem to mediate between goal pursuit and well-being. This finding has an important implication for motivation research, indicating that in new and changed contexts, goal pursuit might boost people's well-being via their adjustment. For instance, research on understanding the relationship between the motivation and the success (e.g., well-being, performance) of students, or newcomers in an organization, should take their adjustment into account. It might hold important information on why they perform well or feel satisfied despite of the challenges of their altered situation.

There are certain questions and areas, however, that present dissertation does not provide enough insight to. First, while we touched upon certain goal dimensions, such as intrinsic-, career-, and broadly measured individual goals (referred to as self-set goals), we might need more sensitive goal measures, taking the content of the goals, the hierarchy of these goals, and even their temporal structure (e.g., long-term vs. short term) into account. This could give us a more dynamic view on how goal pursuit benefits acculturation. Second, in Chapter 4, we found that career importance measured in one time point predicts career success two years later. At this point however we do not know exactly what happens between setting important goals and eventually attaining them. This process might be linear, such as that people systematically work towards a goal without interruption; or non-linear, involving for instance unexpected events, setbacks, and temporary individual fatigue hindering goal striving (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). What happens if goal pursuit is thrown off its track for shorter or longer time? How do migrants replenish their energy to pursue their goal? How do they allocate their resources, and how do they deal with potentially conflicting goals? How do such processes influence migrants' adjustment, and their willingness to stay in the host country, to go back, or to move on? Third, our results stem from a first-generation adult self-initiated migrant population, and provides first-hand information on the goal pursuit of people whose time abroad does not necessarily have a pre-determined end-point and whose migration decision was under their own control. Our sampling is special in the sense that previous research on the relationship between motivation and acculturation is mainly derived from international students whose time in the host-country is often limited and their purpose of stay is univocal. Future research should, however, take other migrant groups into account, for instance economic migrants, trailing spouses, or refugees whose goal pursuit opportunities are more restricted. Lastly, our empirical research was centered on migrants who moved from one developed country to another. While we focused our research mainly on Central-Eastern European migrants in Western Europe (as such increasing generalizability to a certain group of migrants), further research on this topic should regard other types of geographic flows of migration, such as migrants from undeveloped countries to developed countries, etc., as it might have important implications for goal pursuit.

Strengths and Limitations

In the dissertation we aimed to provide both a theoretical and an empirical overview on how goal pursuit contributes to well-being and acculturation. In our literature review we gave a systematic overview of the available research

evidence on the role of goal pursuit in the migration success. To our knowledge, such review, addressing the goal pursuit perspective in the migration setting, did not exist previously. Despite that systematic literature reviews are conducted to ensure rigor, transparency and replicability (Mallett, Hagen-Zanker, Slater, & Duvendack, 2012), they are not without potential drawbacks. For instance, it is often difficult to draw clear conclusions and implications due to the inconsistency in methodological approaches (see Mallett et al., 2012). In addition, such review does not provide information on effect sizes, which otherwise carries important information about for instance to what extent the significant results are meaningful in practice (Mullen & Ramirez, 2006). In this dissertation, empirical findings from scenario experiments, cross-sectional-, and longitudinal field-studies are also reported. It is known that each methodology has their own pitfalls, in terms of validity and generalizability (see Babbie, 2016; Houdek, 2017). We believe that the combination of experimental studies and correlational field studies (cross-sectional and longitudinal) bolsters the confidence

in our findings because by doing so, we may have counterbalanced the weaknesses of one methodology with the strengths of the other. In addition, our results stem from different samples (e.g., migrants with different sending and receiving countries; and majority members of different host societies), which further enhances the reliability of our findings.

Research on migrants' motivation, so far, focused mainly on the content of goals, such as economic and political goals. The present dissertation expanded the research focus on goal content, by providing evidence for the contribution of intrinsic goals to migrants' acculturation and well-being. In addition, our research also provided insight into certain aspects of goal structure, namely on issues concerning the impact of the interplay of goal importance and goal attainment on acculturation. However, current research does not provide much information on the goal processes of migrants; certain questions remain open. We emphasize that future research focus should be directed to the process of how migrants establish, monitor, and adjust their goals and what implications these processes hold to migrants' cultural adjustment.

The way we operationalized and measured migrants' goals reflected the notion that goal pursuit is a conscious process and that migrants are able to access, recall and evaluate their goals. However, even though oftentimes people are well aware of their goals and of their goal related thoughts and feelings, goals sometimes also operate in more implicit ways, affecting behavior and well-being without conscious intention and effort (e.g., Chartrand & Bargh, 1996; Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010; Ferguson, Hassin, & Bargh, 2008; Kruglanski et al., 2002). For

instance, it may be that people are motivated by needs that are not consciously initiated or detected; or it can be that the goal pursuit is consciously initiated but that the connection between goal and response is not detected (Moskowitz, 2014). In addition, there is compelling evidence showing that implicit motives and explicit goals do not always align (Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grassmann, 1998). Moreover, a growing number of studies show that emotional well-being is high in individuals who pursue and realize personal goals that fit their implicit motives (i.e., that are congruent with them), whereas emotional well-being is impaired (sometimes even leading to depression) when explicit goals do not fit their motives (i.e., that are incongruent with them; see Brunstein, 2010; Pueschel, Shulte, & Michalak, 2011). In either case, by measuring goal importance and attainment with previously set goal content categories (such as intrinsic or extrinsic goals or specific career goals) we might have missed important information on the effects of migrants' implicit motives and goals. Future research may consider including measures of implicit motives, and the congruence between migrants' motives and their actual goals.

Practical Implications

By shedding light on the impact of motivation on acculturation and well-being, this dissertation may offer some tentative suggestions for migrants and professionals on how to improve migration success. First, the content of the chapters highlights that migrants themselves can actively try to affect their acculturation and well-being in the host country. Despite the drastic contextual change that migrants face when leaving their home country, dreams and ambitions can be formed, pursued and obtained and in due course give rise to the feeling of being at home and being happy in the host society. As such, migrants should bear in mind that their move should not impede their pursuit of personally valued goals. Specifically, it may be better if they do not lose focus of goals that enhance their autonomy, competence and relatedness. Of course, this might be difficult because migrants often struggle with reaching lower level motives (e.g., finding accommodation, compelling work, etc.), or overestimate the importance of attaining financial goals (Doerschler, 2006). Over time, however, migrants may benefit from not losing the big picture and from actively pursuing their goals. Moreover, those who are planning to migrate, but did not move yet, might also profit from a mindful perspective on goal pursuit before the move. Having realistic expectations, and the right set of goals in mind before the move might facilitate adjustment and well-being after the move. Gaining information and exploring the means of realizing important goals

in the (potential) host country, may contribute to migrants' successful goal pursuit in the foreign environment.

Helper professionals working with migrants could also benefit from keeping a goal pursuit perspective in mind. Past research showed that having too abstract, too general goal representations may decrease goal attainability perceptions and lead to depression (Dickson & Moberly, 2013). Therefore, helper professionals may support migrants setting attainable goals, or help break down general life goals to more short-term, concrete goals. For instance, the desire of "making it in the new country" should be cropped up to certain realistic steps that provide an anchor and guidance to the migrant, involving goal setting in different life domains, such as work, friendships, contact with family and friends in the country of origin, finding a place to live, understanding the administrative process in the host country etc. In the meantime, helper professionals may aid the migrants not to lose focus on superordinate goals, as these provide (and sustain) meaning, purpose and identity. In addition, helper professionals might want to help migrants with noting the progress they make in realizing their goals. This may increase feelings of self-efficacy and self-esteem, which are important stimulants of consequent goal pursuit and overall well-being (Bandura, 1997).

Concluding Remarks

Migration is profoundly tied to motivational forces; people often move in order to maximize their goal potential and to fulfill their life dreams. Despite its motivational nature, the success of migration has rarely been addressed from a goal pursuit perspective. In this dissertation we gave an overview of the current knowledge on how motivation contributes to migration success, and further explored the role of goal pursuit in acculturation and well-being. We have demonstrated that setting important goals (from general intrinsic goals to career-related domain specific goals) and attaining them has an important role in enhancing cultural adjustment and well-being. We hope that the present findings provide a good theoretical and empirical basis for further research on goal pursuit in the migration context.

